

**Community Building and Puppetry:
A Strategy to Create a Better Learning Environment**

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May 7, 2005

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My Teaching Context

Back in September, from the first day of kindergarten, when our students unabashedly marched into our classroom and immediately proceeded to begin to dump crates of manipulatives and blocks onto our carpets, my mentor and I had a feeling our class would not be the typical kindergarten class. Indeed, within the first month of the school year, our classroom had a reputation of being one of the more challenging kindergarten classes in the district in terms of behavior patterns. I am an intern at Radio Park Elementary school in the State College Area School District. I am participating in a year long internship between Penn State University and State College Area School District. I teach a class of twenty in a full day kindergarten class with my mentor teacher. The school we teach in is part of a middle class, suburban school district. Regarding gender, my class includes ten boys and ten girls. Regarding character traits, five of my students are nonconformists who are extremely challenging in terms of behavior. Six of my students are high achievers and social leaders in the classroom who easily influence their peers. Five of my students easily get along with their peers but have trouble getting work done. Lastly, four of my students are quiet students who are anxious to conform. Regarding students with cognitive talents and handicaps, four of my students are possibly gifted, four are artistically talented, three demand strong, constant emotional support, two are possibly learning disabled, and one has recently been diagnosed with ADD/ADHD.

In addition, two are ESL students and two have minor physical handicaps that do not interfere with learning. In regards to reading level, by mid year three students are at a very low reading level and are struggling with alphabet recognition. Ten are emergent readers who have more than half of their alphabet recognition and are beginning to recognize sight words as well. Six are emergent readers at a slightly higher level who have almost all of their alphabet recognition, are able to recognize sight words, and are beginning to sound out basic vocabulary on their own. One student is an exceptionally high reader who is at a fourth grade reading level.

What Led me to This Inquiry and Its Importance

Throughout the year, my mentor and I experimented with different strategies of classroom management: we implemented more structure and routine into our daily schedule than would be typically required in a kindergarten class. We had students in assigned seats on the carpet and at their tables. My mentor was continuously changing our schedule until most of our academics were taught in the mornings when our students were the most focused. Also, we took every opportunity to integrate music, singing, dancing, and movement into our activities throughout the day. We had student volunteers and our school guidance counselor spend extra time with some of our most

severe emotional needs children. It seemed that no matter how we tailored our routine and how much extra one on one time we gave to our special needs children, the class continued to consistently display negative behaviors. These behaviors included: getting up from and moving around on the carpet, calling out, talking to friends, making noises, making negative comments, tattle tailing, talking back, yelling, crying, touching each other, not participating, not following directions, and fighting over materials. Mid- year, we implemented a classroom discipline program called “1-2-3 Magic for Teachers” where we would give students counts or warnings every time a student would display an undesirable behavior. This program requires teachers to give students up to three counts without displaying emotion or providing explanation as to why the student is receiving a count. After the third count, students are asked to “go get some power.” Students go to any empty area in the classroom and reflect on their actions until they feel in control. The problem with this program was that my mentor and I had a hard time remaining unemotional and not explaining why we were upset with our children when they misbehaved. It began to seem that our children who needed the most guidance were spending more time getting power than participating.

Lunchtime at Radio Park is a time when my mentor and I sit and share ideas with the other kindergarten teachers and their interns in the building. One afternoon, one of the teachers mentioned that a few years ago she had begun to incorporate puppetry into

her teaching. She had found that puppets increased motivation and engagement in her students during lessons. Intrigued, I began to talk to other teachers and interns who used puppetry in their classroom and decided to experiment in my classroom with a handmade penguin puppet during one of my lessons on Antarctica. I saw that students were mesmerized by the little puppet and were much more engaged than usual throughout the lesson. I knew that puppetry was something that I wanted to learn more about and explore, but I also wanted to focus my inquiry on improving the classroom learning environment through classroom management strategies. After much research and discussion with my mentor, we came up with the concept of introducing two new puppet friends to the classroom in a class-meeting context. The puppets would be the same age as our students, would display many of the same behavior problems that our students displayed, and would need lots of help learning the rules of kindergarten. Our goal was to improve our students' behavior by making them more aware of our expectations for them through the puppets. However, we did not want to have the puppets teach them about behavior and classroom rules, we wanted our students to be in charge of teaching the puppets.

Consulting Experts

Puppetry is a common technique used by elementary school counselors and other therapists to help children to express their feelings and try new behaviors. It is a way of entering a child's world and demonstrating an understanding of childhood. For the classroom teacher, puppetry has three major functions: entertainment, an educative medium and a therapeutic means. They have been found to facilitate skills of listening, speaking, writing and promote thinking, imagination, creativity, and some spontaneity among students (Leyser, 1984).

“Play has been called the child's natural form of communication, and toys have been referred to as the words children use to express emotions.” (Campbell, 1993)

“Because children live much of their early lives through fantasy, puppets are one effective way of using fantasy to help children cope with their emotions.” (James, 1987)

According to George Dempsie, a teacher in the State College Area School District and author of Using Puppets in a Primary Classroom: A Teacher- Researcher's Findings, studies of children and puppetry confirm that children have an ability to distance themselves from their reality at times, yet participate in it. Puppets can create an illusion of life, assume magical power, and come alive to children (Dempsie, 1997). Dempsie is a firm believer that puppets can be used to reinforce appropriate behavior in the classroom and often uses his own puppets to draw attention to positive interactions and

appropriate behaviors of his own students. He also believes that puppets can be used to encourage problem solving and often has his puppets imitate problems that are occurring in his classroom between several children. He has found that that children are much more eager to help puppets brainstorm about a problem than they are with a teacher. Dempsie also claims that puppets can be used for classroom management and uses a puppet in his classroom to give students warnings about keeping their voices down during periods where he wants them to be quiet.

Puppets can also be used to encourage children to talk and express themselves. They can be used to develop the children's communication and language skills. "Puppets appear to help children to coordinate their own experiences with language as well as teaching them to be an attentive audience and to overcome their egocentrism... Puppets can be a learning tool used to stimulate socio-dramatic play and positively influence the child's intellectual, creative, and social development." (Quisenberry, 1972) Puppets can also help a student see problems from a different view and help them understand their feelings and the feelings of other students. "Using puppets frees the student to deal symbolically with problems, helping them to see things in purer form. Through this clarifying focal lens, students are helped to see themselves and others clearly, putting them in touch with their feelings." (Burn, 1977)

Puppets are a wonderful tool for teachers to use to connect with their students on

a level that they may not be able to as an authority figure. “Puppets also possess a unique feature that makes them valuable to teachers and students alike: they are not the teacher. They can be stupid (and let the students teach them) they can be silly and perhaps the most important, they can be equals-not adult disciplinarians but understanding friends. Thus, they can help to open up the avenues of communication between teacher and students.” (Fleming, 1983)

My Wonderings

- 1) Is puppetry an effective tool for classroom management?
- 2) How can I use puppets to increase positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors?
- 3) How will students react to the introduction of puppets in our classroom: will they embrace them or reject them?
- 4) Do puppets support learning or can they be a distraction?
- 5) Will students make the connection between the puppets behavior patterns and their own behavior patterns?
- 6) Will the puppets’ use of sign language encourage the student’s use of sign language?

- 7) Will the students feel comfortable communicating to the puppets and teaching them how to behave?
- 8) Will students share their thoughts and feelings during open ended class meetings with the puppets?

My Inquiry Plan

- 1) Define Wonderings
- 2) Define behaviors to be increased and decreased in measurable terms
- 3) Design and implement a puppet intervention
- 4) Choose puppets that the class will relate to
- 5) Implement the puppet intervention
- 6) Observe and count the frequency of behaviors
- 7) Analyze data and reflect on effectiveness of intervention
- 8) New wonderings are developed
- 9) Redesign intervention to incorporate new wonderings
- 10) Implement redesigned intervention

Implementing my Inquiry Plan

My first action in my inquiry process was to narrow down my wonderings into one main question. My main wondering was: how can I use puppets to improve classroom management? I began my inquiry by defining the most problematic behaviors that I wanted to be able to change or reduce in measurable terms. I spent about a week observing my students while my mentor was teaching and taking notes on their most common behavior problems while they were being instructed on the carpet. By the end of the week I had a list of fifteen negative behaviors: getting up from the carpet, getting out of seats, calling out and interrupting, talking to friends, moving around on the floor, making noises, making negative comments, tattle tailing, talking back, yelling, crying, touching each other, not participating, not following directions, and fighting over materials.

As I observed our students, I realized that I was also interested in seeing if I could increase some positive behaviors in the classroom as well. The behaviors I wanted to increase were behaviors that my students were aware they were expected to demonstrate but that we were constantly reminding them about. These behaviors include: sitting in ready position at the carpet, raising their hands to speak or ask a question, participating, focusing, and being on task.

Throughout the year, my mentor has been incorporating some elements of sign language into her teaching and I was curious to see if we could use the puppets to encourage the children to give sign language signals to each other as behavior reminders. I specified my main wondering to: how can I use puppets to decrease negative behaviors and increase positive behaviors? I designed a chart that I could use to collect data on the positive and negative behaviors that my students would be exhibiting in the following months. (See Appendix A)

My next step was to decide exactly how I was going to use puppetry in the classroom and design a puppet intervention. My mentor and I came up with an idea of introducing two new puppet friends to the class who had never been to kindergarten before and had to learn the rules of our classroom so that they would be able to remain with us. We thought that perhaps a few times a week we could hold mini informal class meetings where the puppets would demonstrate a specific negative behavior and then we would have our students teach them how they should behave instead.

Throughout the fall, the YMCA's B.A.B.E.S program visited our classroom on Fridays to perform scripted puppet shows on topics such as peer pressure and self-image. We observed how restless and bored our students grew during these performances so we decided we did not want to read from scripts, we did not want our puppet skits to be too

long, and we wanted our students to have the opportunity to interact and talk with the puppets.

Our next step was to pick our puppets. My mentor and I thought that our students might be able to connect with animal puppets more so than with human puppets, so we went on a trip to the Animal Kingdom to find puppets that we could connect with and would feel comfortable using. My mentor was immediately attracted to a wild-eyed, goofy looking dog whom she named Rufus and I was quickly drawn to a sneaky looking ferret whom I named Feasel. We decided that Rufus would have a hyperactive, excited personality and a goofy voice and that Feasel would be sneaky and sometimes manipulative but also very immature.

At last, it was time to implement our intervention and introduce our puppets to the class. My mentor and I told our students that we would be having two new visitors coming in later that afternoon. The students were immediately curious and excited to meet them. During reading workshop, we introduced the puppets to the students and they became immediately captivated and entranced. They seemed to become instantly drawn into the fantasy and make believe that surrounded Rufus and Feasel and accepted them right away as classroom friends. One student said that he hoped they behaved when we announced that the puppets have never been to school before. We explained that the students would have to be good role models for the puppets. After awhile, I put Feasel

away to take a nap and started a read aloud. At first the children were all watching Rufus who was sitting with my mentor on the carpet and were not paying attention to the read aloud.

Soon after I began reading, Rufus became disruptive and began to play and whisper to the students around him. The children were smiling but looked a little bewildered, like they did not know exactly what to do. I gave Rufus three warnings and then I closed my book and told the students that maybe Rufus could not stay if he could not follow rules. The children were disappointed until I suggested that they teach him the kindergarten rules so that he could stay in our class. Suddenly, the students began to speak at once and a couple of them raised their hands with suggestions. We asked the students what Rufus needed to know and wrote and drew their ideas on poster board. The students told us of the importance of listening and keeping their hands to themselves. We asked them what kind of signals they could give to Rufus if he started to break the rules or bother them. To my surprise, I noticed that a student who does not usually participate was raising his hand excitedly and suggested that we give Rufus a signal in sign language if he started to break a rule.

Another student who always has a hard time paying attention and listening went over to our class pledge, brought it over excitedly, and suggested that we should also teach Rufus about kindness. The four kindergarten rules that we came up with that day

were: 1) Listen to and look at the teacher and your classmates when they are talking, 2) Sit in ready position with your hands folded and legs crossed, 3) Raise your hands to share, and 4) Be kind to others.

After my mentor took Rufus away for a treat, I continued the read aloud but noticed that this time the children were sitting up tall and were paying close attention to the book, trying to be good role models. This was so different from their usual behavior on the carpet; they were in ready position, engaged, and were raising their hands to participate. When Rufus came back, the students glanced up but then refocused on the book. When Rufus came over to a couple children and started touching them or whispering to them the kids gave him signals. They seemed sad when my mentor put Rufus away.

The next day, during morning meeting, Feasel made an appearance while my mentor was teaching. The children were so excited that he was coming to the meeting and had been asking about him the previous afternoon. Feasel's problem that day was that he was having trouble staying still. On the carpet, he started picking things off the floor and squirming around, playing with the bulletin board and stacks of books around him. The students began to laugh hysterically. My mentor stopped and told the class that she could not believe what Feasel was doing and that the kids need to explain to Feasel

our class rules. The children raised their hands and explained to Feasel what they taught Rufus the previous day. As we continued the meeting the children gave Feasel silent signals when he began to fool around. When it was time to put Feasel away, the children wished to pet him and get kisses from him.

The following week, Feasel and Rufus made a third appearance. They came out during theme activity and Rufus started a fight with Feasel by sticking out his tongue at him. The kids were hysterical as Rufus and Feasel fought with each other but they also earnestly gave Feasel and Rufus signals to stop and keep their hands to themselves. We asked students what Feasel could have done or said to Rufus when Rufus stuck out his tongue at him and almost all of the kids had suggestions or were raising their hands, especially some of the kids who have behavior problems themselves. One student was very eager to teach Rufus a trick for keeping his mouth quiet and another student had an “I- message” for Feasel to tell Rufus. “I messages” are statements we encourage our students to use to express how they feel when they are upset. It seemed as if the students have learned a lot already about how to control their behavior and were becoming better at verbalizing how they are supposed to act at school and why.

Data Collection and Analysis

After these first few meetings with the puppets and through the next couple

months, I began to observe and count the frequency of behaviors that my students were demonstrating. A few times a week I observed while my mentor was teaching and kept tally of their positive and negative behaviors using the charts I made. At first I observed them during different times of the day, but then I realized that the best way to see real improvement would be to observe the class during the same time frame each day during the same activities. I began to observe them for twenty-minute periods when they were on the carpet during morning meeting and writing workshop anytime between 8:45am and 10:00am. My mentor and I began to notice an increase in positive behaviors demonstrated by all of the students and a decrease in negative behaviors in most students. However, as I looked over the data I had been collecting, I noticed a pattern. Although all the students were increasing the number of positive behaviors they displayed during a twenty-minute time frame, they were not all decreasing their negative behaviors. Furthermore, it was the same five students who were consistently displaying consistent negative behaviors. I decided that since my goal was to try to improve the overall positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors of my class, I would have to look at the total number of positive and negative behaviors of all the students displayed during that twenty minute time frame, even if certain students with special behavior problems were acting as outliers. It was not until I calculated my data and created a line graph of the number of positive and negative behaviors displayed per period over the months that I

saw the effectiveness of our intervention. I saw that the amount of positive behaviors had been significantly raised and the amount of negative behaviors had been reduced.

I also collected and analyzed data through my PDA's observations, my own observations, my students' family message journal entries, special teachers' comments, and class meeting records. Through my own observations, I noticed that soon after we introduced our puppets, students began to model our puppet skits with stuffed animals and would play school with the stuffed animals and teach them how to behave. I also noticed that for show and tell on Fridays, almost all the students began to bring in stuffed animals to share. During choice time, students pretended to be Rufus and Feasel getting into trouble at the drama center. Students' interest in sign language also grew and students began bringing in sign language books at sharing how to sign their name. On the carpet throughout the day, students would sign to each other to give behavior reminders.

Several times a week during writing workshop, the children have the opportunity to write about whatever they want in their family message journals. (See Appendix B) In the weeks that followed our introduction of Rufus and Feasel, students began to write about them and draw about them in the journals. Three examples are: "I love Rufus and I love Feasel. They are cute. Why I like them because they are funny." and "We have two new puppet friends and their names are Rufus and Feasel and we teach them to be quiet

when someone is talking. We teach them signals.” and “I have two new puppet students in my classroom. Their names are Feasel and Rufus. They have never been to school.” I also received a letter from one of my students that said, “I like your hair and your necklace and your Feasel.” In all of the drawings of the puppets, they were smiling and playing together or giving each other friendly messages in speech bubbles. After two months of introducing the puppets, the students’ specials teachers began commenting that the students’ behavior had really improved and that they were able to remain engaged on the carpet longer and were raising their hands and listening. I also began to survey some of the students in the class about what they taught the puppets, why they liked the puppets, and if they had learned from the puppets. I surveyed a variety of different students, some that consistently demonstrate positive behaviors and some that still demonstrate many negative behaviors. Interestingly, all the students had similar answers. The most common responses for what the students taught the puppets were: not talking in the hall, being quiet when the teacher is talking, keeping your hands to yourself, listening, giving signals, sitting quietly on their bottoms, being nice, and being kind. The most common responses for why they liked the puppets were: the puppets are funny, they are like kids, they are nice, and they are funny when they fight. After asking if the class had learned from the puppets, one student responded, “No! They learned from us! We taught them a lot. They were bad and interrupting and fighting! Now they know how to behave in school!”

New Wonderings That I Have Developed

After I had analyzed my data, I was pleased to be able to conclude that there was an overall improvement in classroom management while on the carpet. However, classroom management was still a big issue in our class because students were having trouble getting along and being kind to each other throughout the day. I began to wonder how I could expand my intervention to see if I could use the puppets to build classroom community. I felt that because my mentor and I had decided to give our puppets the roles of being naughty students, we were somewhat restricted in our use of the puppets and that their effectiveness was reaching a plateau. In addition, I felt that we were not using our puppets consistently enough because we did not have a set time that we would use them. Therefore, I felt that it was either time to change the role of our puppets or introduce some new puppets into our classroom.

After a seminar where I had the opportunity to hear George Dempsie explain different ways he uses puppets in his class, I felt that we needed to incorporate the puppets more intermittently into our daily routine. I was fascinated by how Dempsie had dozens of puppets he used throughout the day and how they each served a different purpose. I was also intrigued by how he used puppets to encourage literacy by having a puppet introduce a poem of the day every morning and how students could write to the puppets by putting their letters in a mailbox. I began to develop some new wonderings:

- 1) How can we incorporate puppetry into our daily routine?
- 2) How can we use puppets to build our classroom community?
- 3) Is a class meeting an effective way of building classroom community?
- 5) Can I use puppets to help encourage expression through writing?
- 6) Are puppets more effective when different puppets have specific roles?

My main wondering was how we could use our puppets to build our classroom community. I did not want to change the role of our puppets because our students really related to them so I needed to redesign the strategy behind my puppet intervention. I began researching different classroom management strategies and came across an article on how open classroom meetings promote peaceful schools. Open classroom meetings are organized classroom gatherings where students have the opportunity to voice their opinions and feelings on their concerns and ideas. Open classroom meetings can improve active listening, increase communication skills, increase trust among students and the teacher, improve respectful interaction with peers, and increase motivation and engagement in school (Emmet, 1996).

I thought back to a day during one of first weeks after I introduced the puppets to the class and I had to stay in the classroom with seven students who were staying in for recess. I had decided to have a little meeting with those seven students while they were

staying in. We sat in a circle around a table and I had Feasel to ask them what they thought our classes biggest problems were. The seven students went around the circle sharing what they thought the biggest problems were (ignoring teachers, talking to friends, not following directions) and then Feasel asked them what they could do to solve our class's problems. We went around the circle again and I remember being very impressed with my students' insightful responses.

I looked back on my notes from that day and saw that their solutions included: talking about feelings everyday, being kind, and being reminded of expectations more often. Through my research in the library, I also found former intern Kelly Borneman's thesis paper that included a collection of skits between two puppets, targeting behavior problems. After an excited discussion with my mentor, I began to develop a new strategy behind my puppet intervention.

As part of my new puppet intervention plan: on Mondays and Thursdays after recess, during quiet time, we will gather in a circle to hold a more structured classroom meeting. (See Appendix C) At each meeting, we have a set focus or concern that we address through a skit with Rufus and Feasel. Our meeting consists of two parts: Sharing and Puppet time. Sharing consists of the following: 1) students buzz to their neighbors and then raise their hand to share positive things that are going on in the class or things that they like. 2) Students buzz to their neighbors and then raise their hands to share

problems and concerns for the class. Students are not allowed to use anybody's name but can refer to specific classmates as "a friend" or "someone". 3) Students buzz and raise their hands to share until we have three possible solutions. Puppet time consists of the following: 1) The teachers present a concern of their own for Rufus and Feasel. 2) Rufus and Feasel do a skit on target concern or focus. 3) We perform the skit up until the part where a problem arises. 4) We stop our skit, and ask the class to buzz and raise their hands if they have an idea for how the puppets can solve their problem together. 5) We have Feasel and Rufus try out some of the children's problem solving strategies.

Another part of my new intervention is to set up a mailbox for the puppets. I created a mailbox for our puppets using an empty tissue box which I decorated. Each day students can write on a lined post card to Rufus and Feasel about things they like in the class or problems they are having. At the bottom of the card they can circle if they want it read aloud to the class or not. At the end of each day at closing circle, Rufus and Feasel can read the letters from the students' who wanted to have their letter read aloud. I am excited about this idea because it is a way to build community, encourage writing, increase communication, and incorporate the puppets in a more daily way.

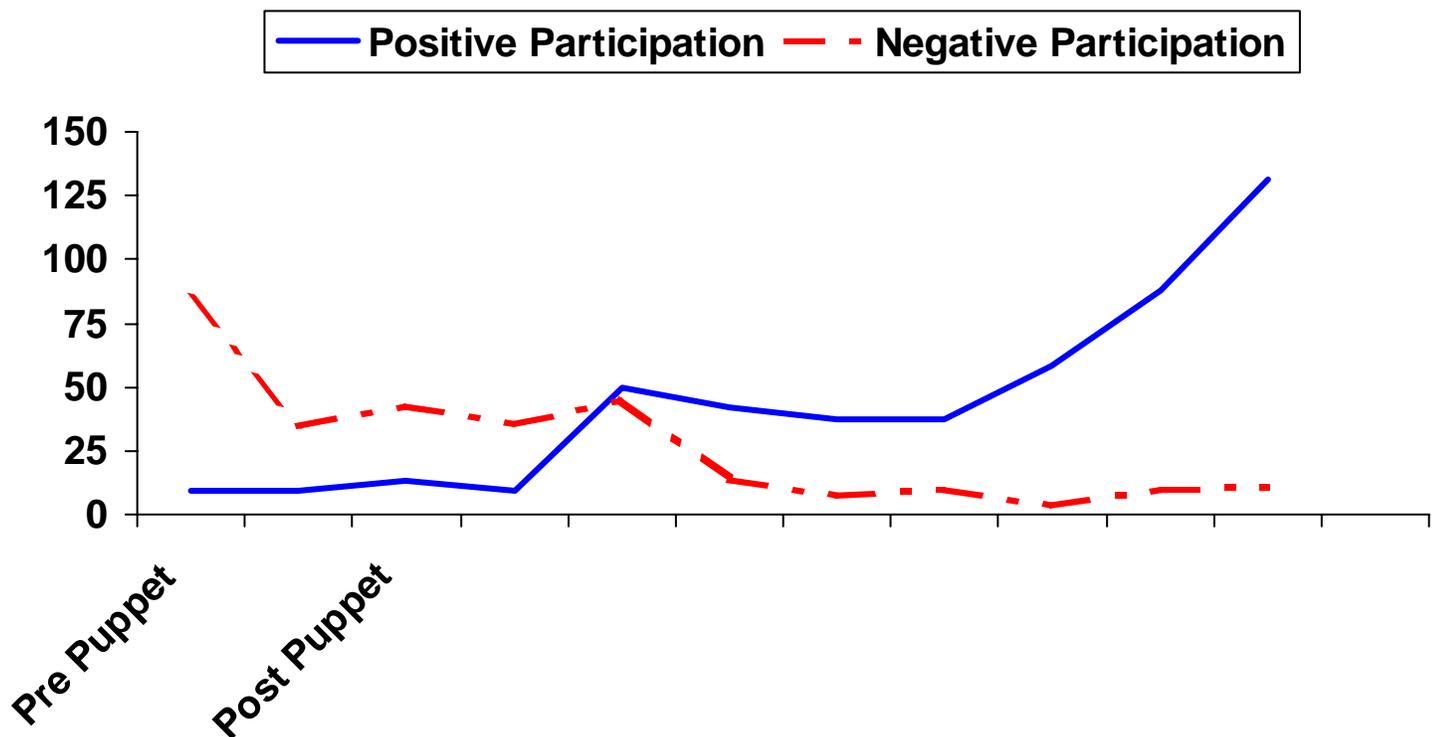
The last part of my new strategy is to introduce some new puppets that serve different purposes to our class. I bought a little finger puppet of a tiny bunny in a tutu

named Teeny, who comes out when the class was starting to get noisy because her ears would hurt. So far bringing her out to quiet the students has been extremely effective. We also found a bunny hand puppet that the students named Fuzzy Wuzzy, whom we have been using to help lead some of the spring lessons, which revolve around bunnies.

Claims and Evidence

Claim 1: Puppets can be used to increase positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors.

Evidence 1: This is a graph that shows the positive behaviors and the negative behaviors displayed by the students over a period of few months. The column of numbers on the left of the chart are the numbers of positive and negative behaviors displayed by the children. The indents that run along the horizontal part of the graph represent a sample of twelve observations selected from over the course of three months. The blue line represents the numbers of positive behaviors demonstrated over the course of the months. The red line represents the number of negative behaviors demonstrated over the course of the months. This graph shows a significant increase in positive behaviors after the introduction of the puppets, and a steady decrease of negative behaviors over the months as well.



Claim 2: Children will embrace puppets for what their teachers pretend they are.

Evidence 2: (Excerpt from a weekly observation journal)

Something that fascinates me is that students really accept the puppets as visitors and seem to completely separate the puppets from my mentor and I- they see them as individual personalities. While I was holding Feasel in my lap, during morning meeting, one student who usually does not care about following rules smiled at Feasel and gave him the thumbs up for being on task when she thought no one was looking. When Feasel was watching the students dance during their song in morning meeting, the students

continued to display role model behavior so that Feasel would be able to learn how to be in our class. They really wanted to impress Feasel and make him happy. One student asked my mentor how Rufus knew the kid's names and my mentor said that Rufus was a little bit magical and the student thought about it for a moment and then said, "No, Rufus is not magic! You told him our names before he came to class!" It is just so amazing how eager the kids are to believe in something that is fantasy and how they don't try to look for evidence that the puppets are just puppets but are so eager to accept them as what we pretend they are.

Claim 3: Puppets can be used to help students feel responsible for their actions as well as develop a team spirit.

Evidence 3: Although students have been learning different signs from American Sign Language throughout the year, they were mostly responding to signs given by teachers. After students came up with the four kindergarten rules, they began signing at each other when their classmates were not following a rule, and also giving each other thumbs up when they were following rules. The puppets also talked a lot about how our class was like a team and we had to work together as a team to clean up- (that we are all responsible for the classroom mess.) The kids are working together to clean up for the first time this year.

Claim 4: Puppets encourage puppetry.

Evidence 4: (excerpt from a weekly observation journal)

Some interesting things I noticed this week since introducing the puppets: On Friday, February 18, 2005 during sharing, over half of the class brought in stuffed animals for their sharing- which is unusual since usually just one or two kids bring in stuffed animals. During center time, the girls who normally play school now are using the stuffed animals as students and are giving them signals and warnings. I heard one of my students tell our Cat in the Hat doll to get some power and remind him of our kindergarten rules. The group of students who are always playing in the drama center has begun to pretend to be Rufus and Feasel getting into trouble and the teachers correcting them.

Claim5: Puppets can be used to encourage children's verbal communication

Evidence 5: (excerpt from a weekly observational journal)

On Thursday, February 24, 2005, I stayed in from recess with seven students who lost their recess privileges for the afternoon after really acting up during lunch. During this time, I had the students sit around the table and had a mini class meeting with them, using Feasel as the moderator. It was very interesting to hear what the students thought about what their biggest problems were and what they could do to improve their behaviors. I felt they were very honest, open, and insightful. They listed moving around on the carpet,

getting out of their seats, laying down on tables, hitting, slapping and kicking, talking back, standing on seats, not following directions and ignoring teachers, shouting, and taking turns as their biggest problems. Then they asked me what I thought the biggest problem was and I said respect and asked them what they thought respect means. They answered that it meant listening to others, following rules, being good, and being kind. They suggested that to work on their problems we talk about feelings more often, are kinder to others, earn rewards for good behavior, ignore children who are not behaving, have rewards for kids who are behaving, and to listen to teachers. I think Feasel's presence in the meeting really helped them feel more comfortable and open up because they see Feasel as one of them, not as an authority figure.

Claim 6: Puppets can be used to encourage problem solving

Evidence 6: At our first class meeting after I redesigned my intervention, during the part of sharing where students bring up their concerns, a lot of children were concerned about students moving other students' clothespins around on the class chart of different center time stations. The students brainstormed two different solutions and voted to have two new chart monitors each week that would be in charge of monitoring the center time stations chart and making sure their classmates are at the centers that they are supposed to be at. It was incredible to see the students target a concern of theirs and come up with a

practical solution completely on their own.

Claim 7: Class meetings are just as beneficial for teachers as they are for students.

Evidence 7: Aside from improving the classroom environment by giving students the tools to problem solve, my mentor and I are learning a lot from the students during their sharing time. My mentor is always striving to improve the structure and flow of her class and we recently made center time more hands on and filled with arts and crafts. We also gave students the choice of when they wanted to complete their five projects for the week and when they wanted to go to center time stations to play. We felt we could give them more freedom during this afternoon time. We also thought that in the morning the students needed more structure and gave students assigned rotating stations during reading workshop. It was wonderful to hear the students say that they really enjoy how the reading workshop stations are running and that it is less noisy and they can concentrate better. They also said that they love the new way we do center time and that they like the new projects. They also said that they thought their listening and following directions had improved a lot. My mentor and I were surprised by how on target their comments were glad to know that they were benefiting from our recent changes.

The Implications For my Future Practice

I have seen how captivated children can become by puppets and have fallen in love with incorporating them into the classroom for the joy and excitement they bring to my students' faces. My inquiry has left me with an incredible experience, a new passion and hobby, and last but not least, more wonderings still. I have learned from this inquiry how important fantasy is to children and it has inspired me to always strive to teach in a playful way, to have fun with your students, to have a sense of humor. As for the wonderings I am left pondering, I look forward to learning how to better incorporate puppetry into our daily routine and incorporating new puppets with different roles into our class. I am looking forwards to incorporating the bunny puppets into our new unit and using them as teachers. I am excited to see if the students will delight in writing letters to the puppets and if it will encourage their writing. I look forward to seeing my students continue to problem solve and express themselves during our class meetings. I wonder if I will be able to watch my class grow closer together as we get close to the end of the year- if the class meetings will lead to community building. I finally am left wondering how else I can use puppetry to build community.

My class is different now than they were a few months ago before they met Rufus and Feasel. They are more aware of their behaviors and how their behaviors make others feel. They feel more responsible of their actions after being role models for their

two new puppet friends that joined our class to learn how to be in kindergarten. They can better communicate and express their feelings to each other and are developing the skills they need to solve their own problems. I see a class that has grown up in a lot of ways and yet still possess the innocent ability to embrace something that is fanciful. When one of my students tugged on my sweater the other day and whispered to me shyly that she loved Feasel, I'm not sure if she was trying to say that she loves me or that she really loves Feasel, but it made me feel so happy to know that in some way I had touched her heart.

“What is Real?” asked the Rabbit one day. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick out handle?”

“Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become REAL.”

- The Velveteen Rabbit

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